Published: Feb. 7, 2018, *Indiana Lawyer*

https://www.theindianalawyer.com/articles/46103-taxpayers-urged-to-beware-of-identity-thieves

Taxpayers urged to beware of identity thieves

By Rob Burgess

rburgess@ibj.com

Some taxpayers may be in for a nasty surprise when they file their returns this year, officials say.

Attorney General Curtis Hill and others are warning Hoosiers to be even warier than usual of identity theft in the wake of several high-profile data breaches, including Equifax.

“We anticipate because of what occurred last year that there should be some more problems this season for people to anticipate,” said Hill.

Hill said thieves have been using other people’s Social Security numbers to file taxes. They may even obtain jobs using this information.
Most victims initially will not even be aware that this has happened. Some will be notified upon e-filing that a tax return already has been filed.

“Once the breach occurs … it’s very difficult to un-ring that bell,” Hill said.

Eva Velasquez, president and CEO of the Identity Theft Resource Center, said in such cases time is of the essence.

“It’s extremely important to file your taxes as soon as you can in order to beat the thieves from filing first,” she said. “The IRS accepts the first return submitted. The only way to check to see if someone has filed on your behalf is to go through the process of filing your taxes.”

In addition to making sure no one else has filed a tax return in your name, the Internal Revenue Service says notices that you owe additional tax, have a refund offset or have had collection actions taken against you for a year you did not file a tax return are also red flags.

Velasquez said taxpayers should take proactive steps to protect their information and should be on the lookout for any suspicious activity. She said checking credit reports, bills and statements, and considering credit locks, credit freezes and fraud alerts were all key.

Hill said another warning sign is if IRS records indicate you received wages or other income from an employer for whom you did not work.

“Oftentimes it can take not only months but in some cases years to try and straighten out all of the repercussions,” said Hill.

If you believe you have been the victim of identity theft, contact the Indiana Attorney General’s Office or call 800-382-5516.